

VZCZCXYZ0000
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHDO #0922/01 2631424
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 201424Z SEP 07
FM AMEMBASSY DOHA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7075
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHXI/LABOR COLLECTIVE
RUEHC/DEPT OF LABOR WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS DOHA 000922

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARP, G/TIP, DRL/ILCSR, IO
LABOR FOR ILAB

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [ELAB](#) [QA](#)
SUBJECT: NEW QATAR LABOR MINISTER PLEDGES COOPERATION ON
LABOR ISSUES

11. (SBU) Summary. State Department Special Representative for Social Issues Ambassador Grover Joseph Rees used his visit to Qatar September 4-8 to engage GOQ officials on the issue of forced labor and trafficking-in-persons (TIP) among the large migrant worker population. During a meeting with the new Labor Minister, he stressed that education is important to prevent TIP, and that only criminalization of TIP practices will deter it. Both sides pledged closer cooperation on labor issues. End Summary.

Forced Labor/TIP

12. (SBU) Special Representative for Social Issues Ambassador Grover Joseph Rees met September 5 with Sultan Al-Dhabit Al-Dousari, the Minister of Civil Affairs and Housing and Acting Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs. (Note: The Ministry of Civil Affairs and Housing will transition into the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs October 1. Minister Al-Dousari will retain his position in the new Ministry.) The discussion focused on migrant worker rights and forced labor/TIP in Qatar. Ambassador Rees emphasized that laws must be strengthened and enforced in order to effectively begin to combat TIP. Al-Dousari responded that the GOQ was in the process of issuing new laws in this regard. He noted that a new law, already endorsed by the Cabinet, will state that the employer has no right to hold the employee's passport and travel documents. They will remain with the employee unless written permission is granted by the employee. (Note: A subsequent conversation with the Chairman of the Qatar National Human Rights Committee (NHRC), Dr. Khalid bin Mohammed Al-Attiyah, noted that the clause allowing for written permission by the employee has been stricken from the draft.)

Labor Complaints

13. (SBU) Al-Dousari told Ambassador Rees that the Ministry has received explicit instructions from the Amir and the Prime Minister to focus on the guarantee of rights for both employers and employees. As such, Al-Dousari told Ambassador Rees that the Labor Department within the Ministry normally takes care of labor issues between sponsors and workers within seven days. If not resolved, the cases are referred to the Labor Court. "Considering that there are 700,000 foreign laborers in the country," Al-Dousari told Ambassador Rees, "the Labor Department has received only 100, 200, maybe

500 complaints, and 80 percent or more of the cases are solved by the Department before referring the cases to the Labor Court." (Note: The Director of the Labor Department reported on Qatar Radio April 13 that the Department receives between 8-13 complaints per day, sometimes more. As such, the Department receives at least between 2,080-3,080 complaints per year. The caseload at the two Labor Courts has resulted in delays of hearings of up to 8-12 months. As such, a third court is expected to open in October.)

"Criminalization"

¶4. (SBU) Al-Dousari noted on several occasions that the Labor Law of 2004 "criminalizes" violations of workers rights. (Note: In fact, the Labor Law does not stipulate any criminal sanctions for labor violations. Any violations are handled within the labor court system as civil cases.) He told Ambassador Rees that the Inspections Department regularly carries out health and safety inspections of labor camps, inspections of wages and contracts, and safety inspections of work sites.

Domestic Worker Rights

¶5. (SBU) Al-Dousari remarked that a new law protecting the rights of domestic workers was in the process of being approved by the cabinet. The new law will be issued in conjunction with all members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). All GCC members are expected to issue the law simultaneously.

Legal Cooperation

¶6. (SBU) Al-Dousari expressly asked Ambassador Rees for assistance on legal issues related to labor. He noted that if the United States has laws to assist the GOQ on labor issues, they would gladly review those laws. He also invited comment on Qatar law from U.S. legal experts.

TIP Report

¶7. (SBU) Specifically regarding the Department of State TIP Report, Al-Dousari stated that prostitution in Qatar was not a big problem. "Because it involves personal freedoms," he added, "the Government does not investigate." He also asked for closer U.S. coordination with the Ministry before the drafting and release of the TIP Report. He cautioned against relying solely on media for its information. (Note: Post regularly consults with Labor Department officials during the year regarding labor statistics and conditions and uses a myriad of confirming sources in its investigation of TIP.) In closing, Ambassador Rees emphasized the GOQ must educate potential victims of TIP and that prevention of the crime is important. He stressed that criminalization of TIP is essential for deterrence.

Comments

¶8. (SBU) Al-Dousari is well-respected by the ruling family. Establishing and reorganizing the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs with Al-Dousari as the Minister bodes well for an increased emphasis on labor issues in Qatar. Although he at times deliberately downplayed the negative aspects of the labor situation in the country during his meeting with Ambassador Rees, he left the door open for closer cooperation with the USG on labor matters. We view the realignment of the Ministry under Al-Dousari as an opportunity to be seized

on workers' rights and TIP issues and will engage accordingly.

19. (U) Ambassador Rees did not have the opportunity to clear this cable.

RATNEY